

# HOME & GARDEN INFORMATION CENTER

## Liriope

Liriope, sometimes called lilyturf, is among our best evergreen ground covers. It multiplies rapidly and requires very little care. It grows well throughout South Carolina.

There are two major species grown in our area: big blue lilyturf (*Liriope muscari*) and creeping lilyturf (*L. spicata*).



Big blue lilyturf (*Liriope muscari*), also commonly known as lilyturf.

Joey Williamson, ©2014 HGIC, Clemson Extension

These two evergreen lilyturf species have slightly different growth habits and degrees of hardiness, but both are favorite landscaping plants. Both plants form mounds of grass-like foliage. Usually the foliage is dark green, but in some varieties it is variegated. There are many cultivars available. They differ in leaf color, size and flower color.

### Height/Spread

Most liriope grow to a height between 10 and 18 inches. *Liriope muscari* generally grows in a clump form and will spread to about 12 to 18 inches wide.

*Liriope spicata* spreads rapidly by underground stems (rhizomes) and will cover a wide area. Because of its rapid spread, *L. spicata* is not suitable for an edging but is excellent for groundcover.



Variegated liriope (*Liriope muscari* 'Variegata') surrounds mailbox post.

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### Ornamental Features

Lilyturf forms a dense evergreen groundcover with a grass-like appearance. It blooms in July to August with lavender, purple, pink or white flower spikes. Although the flowers are individually small, they are very showy, since each plant has many spikes of blooms. Clusters of bluish black berry-like fruit follow the flowers.

### Landscape Use

Liriope can be used as a groundcover under trees and shrubs and as a massed planting on slopes and banks. *Liriope muscari* and its cultivars can also be used as low edging plants along paved areas or in front of foundation plantings.

Liriope is remarkably tough. It will grow in deep shade or full sun, sand or clay. It can endure heat, drought and salt spray, but will not take "wet feet"; it requires moist, well-drained soil. Flowers are produced most freely in a sunny location.

Space the plants about 1 foot apart when planting. As the plants grow and mature, they can be dug and separated - usually this is done every three or four years if you want to increase your plants. Division is rarely necessary for the health of the plant.

You should mow off the foliage of these ground covers in late winter before growth starts with a lawnmower set at the highest possible cutting height. Be sure not to injure the crown of the plant when you mow, and be sure the mower blades are sharpened. It is important to prune liriope before spring growth begins - late January in lower coastal South Carolina and by mid-February in upstate South Carolina.

## Problems

Reddish-brown spots that appear along leaf margins and leaf tips are caused by a fungal disease known as anthracnose, which is caused by *Colletotrichum* species. This disease becomes more prevalent with frequent rainfall or overhead irrigation. It causes a rapid dieback of the foliage. The fungus can remain over-winter in dead foliage.



Anthracnose of liriope (*Liriope muscari*).  
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Mow or trim off last year's leaves in late winter to a height of about 3 inches and remove as much of the

debris as possible. Avoid over-watering or watering late in the day. This may be all that is needed to stop disease.

Leaf and crown rot is caused by *Phytophthora palmivora* (a fungus-like pathogen), along with *Fusarium oxysporum* and *Rhizoctonia solani* as secondary fungal pathogens. 'Evergreen Giant' is a very common cultivar that is planted in the Southeast, and it is especially susceptible to leaf and crown rot. Initially with leaf and crown rot there will be a yellowing of the interior foliage. As the disease progresses, the basal leaf sections will turn brown, and then this discoloration will move further outward on the foliage. If plants are removed, an inspection of the root system will reveal discolored roots that are sloughing off their outer root tissue.



Leaf and crown rot of *Liriope muscari* 'Evergreen Giant'.  
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Plants that are showing symptoms should be removed and disposed of immediately before there can be further spread of the disease. Fungicides will not cure the plants of this disease, but only slow its progression. Fungicide treatments will leach from the soil after a few weeks, and then the disease will reappear.

When planting liriope, do not install plants too deeply where the crown of the plant is buried. Keep liriope healthy by watering weekly as needed during summer droughts, don't over-apply mulch next to plants, and don't over-fertilize. When fertilizing, scatter fertilizer around plants but don't let fertilizer granules become wedged between leaves. These things can all stress and predispose liriope plants to become infected with leaf and crown rot. Do not plant liriope in poorly drained sites.



Liriope scale (*Pinnaspis caricis*) or fern scale (*P. aspidistrae*) may infest liriope and causes chlorotic spotting (yellow) or reddish spotting of the leaves and foliar necrosis. Cut back the foliage in the late winter and clean up the clippings to significantly help in scale control. Thoroughly wet the infested liriope with a 2% horticultural oil spray (5 tablespoons per gallon of water) after pruning to aid in control.

## Species & Cultivars

**Big Blue Lilyturf (*Liriope muscari*):** This lilyturf grows in a clump form, making it well-suited for edging. The leaves are a little wider (3/8 to 1/2-inch wide) and the flowers somewhat bigger than those of creeping lilyturf.

- 'Majestic' is a strong grower that grows to 12 to 15 inches tall. It has large, showy, deep lilac flowers and 1/2-inch wide dark foliage.
- 'Monroe's White' has bright white flowers in large clusters. Matures at 12 to 15 inches tall. This variety does best in shade, and has slightly slower growth.
- 'Christmas Tree' has unusual light lavender flower spikes in the form of a Christmas tree. It grows slowly to 12 to 15 inches tall, and prefers shade.
- 'John Burch' has a thin border of creamy yellow edging each leaf blade. It will have less variegation if grown in shade. The flowers are lavender and it grows to 12 to 15 inches tall.
- 'Evergreen Giant' has stiff-textured leaf blades and white flower spikes. Mature height is 18 to 24 inches tall.
- 'Densifolia' is very similar to 'Evergreen Giant', grows to 18 to 24 inches tall, and has lavender flowers spikes.
- 'Gold Band' is an excellent specimen plant. It has wide leaf blades with a gold edge and lavender flower spikes. Mature height is 12 to 18 inches.
- 'Samantha' is a green leafed cultivar with pink flower spikes. Mature height is 12 to 15 inches tall.

- 'Big Blue' matures at 12 to 15 inches tall and has less of a tendency to spread by stolons. It has lavender flower spikes.
- 'Emerald Goddess' grows to 16 to 20 inches tall and has lavender flower spikes.
- 'Ingwersen' has 1/2-inch wide, dark green foliage and blooms profusely with long full lavender flower spikes. However, it blooms the best in part shade to full shade. It matures at 12 to 15 inches tall.
- 'Royal Purple' has deep purple flower spikes and the plants mature at 12 to 15 inches tall.
- 'Silver midget' has dark green leaves with irregular variegation and lavender flower spikes. It grows to 10 to 12 inches tall.
- 'Variegata' has green foliage with white to yellow variegation on the edges of leaves. The flower spike is lavender and the plant matures at 10 to 15 inches tall.
- 'Silvery Sunproof' has leaves striped white and yellow. It withstands sun better than most variegated forms; 12 to 15 inches tall, with purple flowers.
- 'Webster Wideleaf' has lavender flower spikes on 12 to 15 inch tall plants. Widest leaf of any cultivar.

**Creeping Lilyturf (*Liriope spicata*):** This lilyturf grows 10 to 15 inches tall and spreads indefinitely. The leaves are more narrow (1/4-inch wide) than on *L. muscari*. This habit makes it ideal for a lawn replacement or erosion controlling groundcover. It can be invasive in the wrong location. The flowers are smaller and lighter in color.

- 'Silver Dragon' has slender, highly variegated green and white leaves and lavender flowers. It reaches about 12 to 16 inches tall. 'Silver Dragon' is great for lighting up a dark area. It does not grow as densely as most lilyturf.
- 'Franklin Mint' has pale lavender flower spikes above green leaves that grow to 12 to 15 inches tall. The leaves are a little wider than those of 'Silver Dragon'.

Mondo grass (*Ophiopogon species*) is similar in use and appearance to lilyturf. You can find information on mondo grass in [HGIC 1110, Mondo Grass](#).

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